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ABSTRACT

The Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program was developed to provide an education for students who were expelled from school or who were adjudicated to attend an alternative school. The program was operated by the Harris County Juvenile Board, but the Houston Independent School District contracted with the county to place expelled students in the program. Operated at the Houston School for Accelerated Learning, the program was neither a residential nor a detention program. Program operation was evaluated for the 1997-98 school year. In fall 1997, there were 270 students, 48.9% of whom were African American, 46.7% Hispanic, and 4.4% White. The attendance rate for the school ranged from 87% to 89%. In the fall semester, 46.3% completed their term and returned to their home schools, but in the spring, only 17.7% completed their term and returned to their home schools. Recommendations for program improvement include taking measures to improve attendance rates and increase the numbers of students who return to their home schools. (Contains two tables and four references.) (SLD)

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Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program 1997-98.

Houston Independent School District

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Executive Summary

Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program
1997–98

Program Description

The Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program (JJAEP) was developed during the 1997–98 school year in accordance with Section 37.011 of the Texas Education Code. The program was developed to provide an education for students who were expelled from school or who were adjudicated by a court order to attend an alternative school. Although the program was operated by the Harris County Juvenile Board (HCJB), the Houston Independent School District, like other school districts in Harris County, contracted with the county to place expelled students in the program. Operated and offered at Houston School for Accelerated Learning, the program was unique in that it was neither a residential nor detention program, although it admitted students who had committed more serious offenses including felonies.

Upon placement of a student in the JJAEP, the school district was required to submit the following student records:

- Middle School Plan for students in middle school;
- Graduation Plan for students in grades 9–12;
- Current transcript including all achievement test records;
- Withdrawal form indicating the students' list of courses in which they were enrolled and earned grades, the text books, and other instructional materials they used;
- Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) summary sheet;
- Attendance record during the previous year;
- Attendance record during the current year; and
- Individual Education Plan (IEP) form.

The Texas Education Code [Section 37.011(d)] required the JJAEP curriculum to focus on English language arts, mathematics, science, history, and self-discipline. In addition to these courses, students placed in the JJAEP at Houston School for Accelerated Learning were taught computer science, business education, and other social study courses such as geography, social/life skills, and economics. Each student was placed in a study program that enabled him/her to work in all basic subjects and electives at his/her own pace. Teaching was conducted through the use of textbooks and video- or computer-based subject material. Learning was achieved through independent study, individual tutoring, collaborative learning, and small and large group instruction. With three instructors for every twenty-four students, the student/teacher ratio was 8 to 1.

In accordance with Section 21.003(a) of the Texas Education Code, the JJAEP had a certified educator (Learning Specialist) who monitored and reviewed all academic work of each student prior to the student's return to the regular school. The educator certified the completion of course work based on a determination that the student had mastered the essential knowledge and skills for a course at the seventieth percentile pursuant to Section 28.002 of the Texas Education Code. Additionally, all course credits earned by the student while at the program were reflected on the student's school district transcript. In this context, a minimum of two grades per week were recorded for each student. A student who scored below 70% was awarded a failing grade. Progress reports were provided at three week intervals. This means that report cards, with grades and comments, were mailed to parents/guardians at the end of a standard grading period.

The major goals for the JJAEP were to:

- Provide educational services to students.
- Establish consistency, predictability, and appropriateness of student placement following expulsion from regular schools or alternative education programs.
- Return students to regular school settings.
- Provide discipline necessary to modify students' behavior as they prepared to return to regular school setting.
- Provide educational options for juvenile courts.

The purpose of this report was to describe the

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Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program and to analyze data on the basis of the following research questions:

1. What were the demographic characteristics of the HISD students enrolled in the Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program (JJAEP) during the fall and spring semesters of the 1997–98 school year?

2. What was the number of HISD students in the JJAEP during the fall and spring semesters of the 1997–98 school year?

3. What was the attendance rate of the HISD students in the JJAEP during the fall and spring semesters of the 1997–98 school year?

4. What was the percentage of HISD students who completed the JJAEP and returned to regular school setting?

Findings

- During the fall semester of 1997, 48.9% of the students were African America, 46.7% Hispanic, and 4.4% White. In the spring semester of 1998, over half of the student population was Hispanic (52.7%) whereas 44.4% were African American. The percentage of White students actually decreased from 4.4% to 2.9%. There were no Native American or Asian/Pacific Islander students in the program.

- The attendance rate of HISD students in the JJAEP ranged from 87% to 89% as reported by the program personnel.

- Of the 270 students in the program in the fall semester of 1997, 46.3% completed their term and returned to home schools. This percentage fell to 17.7% in the spring semester of 1998.

Recommendations

1. Strive to increase student attendance rate from between 87% and 89% to the State of Texas' minimum requirement of 94%. Furthermore, since student transportation to and from the program facility does not appear to be a problem, 65%–70% of the students should maintain an attendance rate of 100%. The City-As-School, a similar program as JJAEP offered in Buffalo, New York, had 65% of its students maintain 100% attendance rate for a period of two years.

2. Although the Memorandum of Understanding did not specify the percentage of students that should be returned to their home schools within a specified period of time, the JJAEP should continue to increase efforts to return more students to their regular school setting. These efforts were demonstrated in the fall of 1997 when 125 students completed the program and returned to their regular schools. Additionally, during the spring of 1998, 55 students returned to their regular school setting after finishing their term at the JJAEP.

3. Since more students are opting to continue the program after completing their term, the JJAEP may consider creating an additional program specifically designed to accommodate these students. This will reduce overcrowding and the student/teacher ratio. Parents and the sending schools indirectly demonstrated that need at the end of the spring of 1998 when they chose to keep 37 students in the program even though the students had completed their term.

JUVENILE JUSTICE ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM
1997–98

Purpose: *To review and analyze the program on the basis of the following criteria: the number of HISD students placed in the program after expulsion from their regular schools; attendance during the Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program placement; and return of students to their home schools.*

Design: *Descriptive.*

Population: *Students placed in the Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program after expulsion and/or adjudication by court order were the target population of this report.*

Method: *Qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect and analyze data.*

Findings: *During the fall semester of 1997, 48.9% of the students were African America and 46.7% were Hispanic. White students accounted for 4.4% of the students. In the spring semester of 1998, over half of the student population was Hispanic (52.7%) whereas 44.4% were African American. The percentage of White students actually decreased from 4.4% to 2.9%. There was no indication that Native American or Asian/Pacific Islander students were placed in the program during the 1997–98 school year. Attendance rate ranged from 87% to 89% as reported by the program personnel. Of the 270 students in the program during the fall semester of 1997, 46.3% completed the program and returned to their home schools. This percentage fell to 17.7% during the spring semester of 1998.*

Conclusions: *The program's main goals were to provide an alternative education for students expelled from their regular school for committing crime and to modify the criminal behavior of these youth. Information collected during site visits indicated that the educational curriculum and the grading system were identical to those in regular schools. The learning environment was, however, more structured due to discipline problems. Under these circumstances, 30% to 40% of the student population still returned to their home schools during the 1997–98 school year.*

Educational Implications: *Students who commit a crime can have a chance in society to change their behavior and continue with their education.*

Introduction

Background

In accordance with Chapter 37 of the Texas Education Code, a county with a population greater than 125,000 was required to develop a Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program (JJAEP) subject to the approval of the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission (Texas Education Code, 1996). The program would provide an education to students who engaged in misconduct that led to expulsion from their regular school. In this context, the Harris County Juvenile Board (HCJB) operated a JJAEP for youths who were expelled from school for committing certain criminal offenses. Located at Houston School for Accelerated Learning, the program was started in Harris County during the 1997–98 school year to serve school districts in the county.

Under Section 21.557 of the Texas Education Code, Houston Independent School District (HISD) contracted with the HCJB for placement of expelled students in the JJAEP (Harris County, 1997). Section

21.557 allowed school districts to contract with a private or public organization to operate a community-based alternative education program for students who might be "at-risk" or who had committed a criminal offense.

Student placement in the JJAEP was either mandatory or discretionary. Mandatory placement was for students who were expelled from their regular schools for committing more serious offenses such as drugs, alcohol, assault, retaliation, and other criminal offenses (Texas Education Code, Section 37.007). Students in this category were placed in the program as "Category A" students. A student did not, however, qualify as Category A student unless and until an offense or investigative report was filed by a law enforcement agency as required by rules adopted by the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission (TJPC). Additionally, students who engaged in conduct requiring expulsion and who were found by a juvenile court to have engaged in delinquent conduct were adjudicated and ordered, under Title 3 of the Family Code, to attend the JJAEP in the area where the conduct occurred. Students placed on probation under Family Code Section 54.04, or who were placed on deferred prosecution under Family Code Section 53.03 attended the JJAEP for the remainder of their expulsion period or for the period the student was on court-ordered probation, or deferred prosecution, whichever was earlier.

Discretionary placement in the JJAEP was for students expelled by the school district for committing a less serious offense as described in Section 37.007 (b) or (f), or for engaging in serious or persistent misbehavior covered by Section 37.007 (c). Students in this category were placed in the program as "Category B" students. Nevertheless, if the school district decided against placing Category B students in the program after their expulsion, the JJAEP was not responsible for the education of these students.

The school district could also use its discretion to send a student to the JJAEP if it determined that the student engaged in felonious conduct off campus. Section 37.006 (a) of the Texas Education Code required a student to be removed from class and placed in an alternative education program if the student engaged in conduct punishable as a felony. The student might also be referred to the appropriate juvenile court officer.

Students expelled for Category A offenses were required to immediately start attending the JJAEP until they completed the court-imposed requirement and/or until the expulsion term expired. Category B students attended the program for the period of the individual student's expulsion. The student would, however, remain in the program for the remainder of the fall semester and the entire spring semester if placed in the program after the first six weeks of the school year. The student remained in the program for the remainder of the spring semester and the entire fall semester of the following school year if expelled after the fourth six weeks (Memorandum of Understanding, 1997).

Program Description

The JJAEP was a non-residential program for youth who were expelled from school for committing criminal offenses. The program was offered at the Houston School for Accelerated Learning in southwest Houston. Its original location was in northwest Houston. Placement of students in the program was normally initiated by the school district where the students regularly attended school. In some cases, the Juvenile Justice Court adjudicated students and ordered them to attend the program. In either case, after the referral had been received at the JJAEP, the program's admission counselor notified the parents/legal guardian of the student within forty-eight hours and scheduled a placement interview.

Upon placement of a student in the JJAEP, the school district was required to forward to the program the same records it provided to another school whenever a student transferred. These records included but were not limited to the following student records:

- For students in middle school, the student's Middle School Plan;
- For students in grades 9–12, the student's Graduation Plan;
- The student's current transcript including all achievement test records;
- Withdrawal form indicating the student's list of courses in which he/she was enrolled and earned grades, the text books, and other instructional materials he/she used;
- The student's Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) summary sheet;
- The student's attendance record during the previous year;
- The student's attendance record during the current year; and
- The student's Individual Education Plan (IEP).

During the placement process to the JJAEP, each student completed diagnostic testing in reading, writing, and mathematics. On the basis of this assessment, students were placed for instruction in reading, writing, and mathematics at one of the following grade levels:

- At or above age-appropriate grade levels,
- Less than two years behind age-appropriate grade level,
- More than two years behind age-appropriate grade level, and
- General Equivalency Diploma (GED).

Students were expected to complete one or more performance levels while they were enrolled in the JJAEP. All students who entered the program started at level one. Movement from one level to the next, within the self-contained classroom was earned over each two-week (10 day) period in three categories:

- Attendance,
- Behavior, and
- Learning.

The final decision to move each student when all categories were met was determined individually with the student, the co-teaching team, and the team manager. Classroom meetings with teachers, instructional assistants, and students were held at the beginning of the first period each Monday morning to discuss rules, discipline management, and goal setting for the week.

Points were awarded for behaviors that met the categories of attendance, behavior, and learning. Points were also given to those students who had completed their assignments and tasks without behavioral problems. As points were awarded by instructors, it was the responsibility of each student to record them on individual point record. The instructors also maintained a master list of points for each student. Students could earn up to 50 points per day, 250 points per week, and 500 points in two weeks. To advance to the next level, students needed at least 400 points. If students had a problem earning points, they had to schedule a conference with an individual instructor assigned to them.

To move from Level 1 to Level 2 in a ten-day schedule, students had to meet the following conditions:

- Attendance: A student had to be in school 8 out of a ten-day schedule (that is, 80% attendance). Any absence had to be an excused.
- Behavior: A student had to earn at least 400 points and have no more than two written behavior reports.
- Learning: A student had to complete all assigned work.

Students at Level 1 were, nevertheless, awarded a bronze dot or star on badge and on name plate at the student's station and two tickets every Friday for a prize/gift certificate.

Students who moved from Level 2 to Level 3 in a ten-day schedule had to satisfy the following conditions:

- Attendance: A student had to be in school 9 out of 10 days (that is, 90% attendance); any absence required an advance notification and excuse.
- Behavior: A student was required to earn at least 400 points and have no more than one written behavior report.
- Learning: A student had to complete all assigned work at masterly level (80%–100%).

Privileges at Level 2 included a silver dot or star on badge and on name plate at the student's station and five tickets awarded every other Friday for a prize or gift certificate.

To remain at Level 3, a student's attendance record had to be 90% or higher. Students with 100% attendance rate for the 10-day schedule were recognized. Furthermore, a student had to maintain the overall points of at least 400 and have no written behavioral reports. In addition to completing all work assignments at mastery level (80%–100%), a student at Level 3 had to continue making measurable academic progress documented through skill exercises, unit tests, chapter tests, progress tests, and other learning tasks that were measured and recorded.

Privileges at Level 3 included:

- Gold dot or star on badge and on name plate at student's station,
- Wearing clothes other than the required dress code on Fridays, and
- Field trips selected by team managers and approved by the school administrators.

The Texas Education Code [Section 37.011(d)] required the JJAEP curriculum to focus on English/language arts, mathematics, science, history, and self-discipline. In addition to these courses, students

placed in the JJAEP at Houston School for Accelerated Learning were taught computer science, business education, and social study courses such as geography, social/life skills, and economics. Each student was placed in a study program that enabled him/her to work in all basic subjects and electives at his/her own pace. Teaching was conducted through the use of textbooks and video- or computer-based subject material. Learning was achieved through independent study, individual tutoring, collaborative learning, and small and large group instruction. With three instructors for every twenty-four students, the student/teacher ratio was 8 to 1.

In accordance with Section 21.003(a) of the Texas Education Code, the JJAEP had a certified educator (Learning Specialist) who monitored and reviewed all academic work of each student prior to the student's return to the regular school. The educator certified the completion of course work based on a determination that the student had mastered the essential knowledge and skills for a course at the seventieth percentile pursuant to Section 28.002 of the Texas Education Code (Harris County, 1997). Additionally, all course credits earned by the student while at the JJAEP were reflected on the student's school district transcript. In this context, a minimum of two grades per week were recorded for each student. A student who scored below 70% was awarded a failing grade. Progress reports were provided at three week intervals. This means that report cards, with grades and comments, were mailed to parents/guardians at the end of a standard grading period.

The Houston School for Accelerated Learning had no residential facilities. Students placed in the JJAEP, therefore, commuted to and from the location of the program. Chapter 37 of the Texas Education Code had no provision requiring school districts to provide transportation for students placed in the JJAEP. School Districts could, however, provide transportation based upon their needs and budgetary constraints. Nevertheless, the JJAEP had arrangements for the students to be transported to and from the program facility by one of the following modes:

- The JJAEP's contracted bus service,
- The student's custodial parent or guardian,
- A commissioned law enforcement officer, or
- A juvenile probation officer.

Upon arrival, students were routinely searched by school officials and often metal detectors were used to screen them for weapons and other contraband. In some cases where law enforcement authorities were involved in a search, the criminal law standards were applied.

Once in the facility, students were not allowed to leave or roam the premises without permission from the program administrator. Furthermore, for safety reasons, both female and male students had separate class rooms at different locations of the facility.

Program Goals and Objectives

The major goals for the JJAEP were to provide educational services to students, to establish consistency, predictability, and appropriateness of student placement following expulsion from regular schools or alternative education programs, to return students to regular school settings, to provide discipline necessary to modify students' behavior as they prepared to return to regular school setting, and to provide educational options for juvenile courts. The contractual agreement between the HCJB and HISD required a comprehensive evaluation of the JJAEP that included but was not limited to data on demographic characteristics, number, and attendance rate of HISD students enrolled, and the percentage of the students who returned to their regular schools after completing the program.

Program Funding and Source

According to the contractual agreement between HISD and HCJB, the cost of operating the JJAEP during the 1997-98 school year was $500,000. The funding sources were the 1997–98 General Fund and state allocations.

The students served in the JJAEP who were eligible for state funding through the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission were those who had been expelled by the school district for committing a felony or a mandatory expulsion offense. Students ineligible for state funding were those who had been expelled for serious and persistent misbehavior. These discretionary expulsions were funded through the district's General Fund.

Purpose of the Evaluation Report

The purpose of this evaluation was to describe the Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program and to analyze data on the basis of the following

criteria: the number of students placed in the program after expulsion from regular schools; attendance during the JJAEP placement; and return of students to their home schools. The following research questions were addressed:

1. What were the demographic characteristics of the HISD students enrolled in the Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program (JJAEP) during the fall and spring semesters of the 1997–98 school year?
2. What was the number of HISD students in the JJAEP during the fall and spring semesters of the 1997–98 school year?
3. What was the attendance rate of the HISD students in the JJAEP during the fall and spring semesters of the 1997–98 school year?
4. What was the percentage of HISD students who completed their term in the JJAEP and returned to regular school setting?

Review of the Literature

Although much has been said about juvenile justice alternative education programs, no solid research has been conducted on the topic. Much of the research available focuses more on violence in schools than on the alternative education programs for the juvenile offenders. Some researchers have argued that the juvenile justice system has contributed to the increase in juvenile crime because the focus is more on procedures and legal technicalities than on the welfare of children and protection of society (Hume, 1996). Rather than building more prisons and incarcerating juveniles for longer periods, Hume (1996) argues that the juvenile courts and school districts should provide better support systems, more juvenile delinquency prevention programs, and more resources for juveniles on the front end who enter the criminal justice system after committing minor offenses. Hume's (1996) argument is supported by statutes that require students expelled from school to be placed in an alternative education program for at least one semester depending on the seriousness of the offense committed.

The Second Chance School in Topeka, Kansas was one of the schools across the country that provided an alternative education program for students who had been expelled from their regular schools for possession of weapons or assaulting a staff member (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). Students placed in the program engaged in studies of math, social sciences, and language skills. They also participated in some recreational and community service activities. Depending on the seriousness of the offense, students attended the program for one semester or one year. The program developed partnerships with the juvenile courts, the public schools, the police department, and the recreational department. Ninety percent of the student population during the 1995–96 school year successfully completed the program.

In Buffalo, New York, the City-As-School was an alternative education program which placed students expelled from their home schools as interns in dozens of sites across the city to earn academic credits for the work they performed (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). The students became familiar with a variety of work environments and were exposed to different kinds of role models. Throughout the program, each student worked on his/her Learning Experience Activity Packet as a set of goals and activities customized for each student and internship. Students' progress was monitored by on-site supervisors and program teachers. The students became more motivated and their criminal tendencies were reduced. For a period of two years, 65% of the students maintained 100% attendance, completed all their internships, and earned their high school diplomas.

The Community Academy in Boston, Massachusetts provided a safe and challenging academic learning environment for students expelled from their regular schools (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). In working with students, the academy used a cognitive approach that focused on modifying inappropriate behavior and that enhanced academic potential. Students were required to participate in counseling programs conducted by the program's staff psychologist. The counseling program focused on personal growth and development. Additionally, assessments and drug awareness education were provided by substance abuse clinicians. Students who needed intensive or long-term treatment were referred to local community health centers. Although the program was designed under the assumption that an average student would require two years to finish the program, 45% completed the program in one year and returned to their regular schools.

The Borough Academies in New York City helped students expelled from their regular schools to develop positive behavior skills as they prepared them for entrance into college or a job after high school

(U.S. Department of Education, 1996). Behavior change through positive reinforcement and flexibility was the primary focus at the Borough Academies. The program provided students with a combination of academic and behavior management skills. Students earned credit toward a New York City High School diploma through three components of the program: academic, guidance, and internship/vocational. The Academies had an 86% graduation rate.

The consensus among educators and others concerned with juvenile crimes in schools is that expelled students should receive educational counseling or other services to help modify their behavior (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). Research has indicated that it is less costly to address behavioral problems and their underlying causes as quickly as possible than to wait until the student becomes involved with the criminal justice system (U.S. Department of Education, 1996).

Methodology

Data Collection

The collection of data for this report started in September 1997 and continued until May 1998. A total of five site visits were made to the program facility. During these site visits, qualitative research design was used to collect data for this report. The design used primary and secondary sources of information. Primary sources included classroom observations, telephone, and face-to-face interviews with the principal and the program staff members.

Classroom observations and face-to-face interviews with the program staff members were conducted during the site visits. Observations were necessary because the participants were observed in the actual learning and behavior modification process. Face-to-face interviews involved not only questions and answers about the program but also general conversations relating to student placement in the program, curriculum, discipline, and behavior modification. Telephone interviews were frequently used, especially when data needed to be clarified.

Other sources of data collection involved the examination of program records, manuals, student handbooks, and brochures. The Pupil Education Information Management System (PEIMS) database was used to examine the program records as well. The official report from the TEA was issued for the fall semester in February, 1998.

Student handbooks, program manuals and brochures were also used to collect data. These materials were examined during the face-to-face interviews with the program staff. Information obtained from these sources was compared with the information collected during the interviews and also with the criteria set in the Memorandum of Understanding for accuracy and relevancy. The Memorandum of Understanding was a contractual agreement entered into between HCJB and HISD to provide alternative educational opportunities for students expelled from their regular schools.

Population

The population for this report was composed of all students who were enrolled in the JJAEP during the 1997–98 school year. Two categories of students were placed in the program: Category A and Category B students. Students in Category A were either expelled from their regular schools after committing more serious offenses, including assault, carrying a weapon, and using drugs or sanctioned into the program under a court order.

Students placed in the JJAEP under Category B were expelled from their home schools on discretionary basis after committing less serious offenses.

Data Analysis

Descriptive procedures were used to analyze data. Data from PEIMS were analyzed in an aggregate format. Although, in some cases, data were analyzed by ethnicity or by grade levels, no attempt was made to identify the participants by name. The validity of the information obtained through interviews was determined by examining the official records such as the PEIMS database released by the TEA. Additional records that confirmed validity were school and program manuals, student handbooks, and observational techniques. Observational procedures involved nonparticipant observations and frequent notes-taking during site visits.

Results

What were the demographic characteristics of the HISD students enrolled in the Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program (JJAEP) during the 1997–98 school year?

Demographic characteristics of HISD students placed in the JJAEP were examined for both the fall semester of 1997 and spring semester of 1998. The variables examined in each case were race or ethnicity which comprised Native American, Asian Pacific Islander, African American, Hispanic, and White. Gender, as a variable, was examined in terms of male and female. The analysis of data indicated that during the fall semester of 1997, there were 132 African American and 126 Hispanic students placed in the program. There was no record, however, reflecting placement of Native America and Asian/Pacific Islander students in the program. The number of male students was over three times that of females in the program. **Table 1** illustrates the demographic characteristics of HISD students who were enrolled in the JJAEP during the fall semester of 1997.

During the spring semester of 1998, overall placement in the JJAEP increased by 41 students, again of 15.2%. The breakdown shows that the number of African American and Hispanic students increased by 4.5% and 30.2%, respectively. The number of White students, however, decreased by 25%. There was no record indicating placement of Native America and Asian/Pacific Islander students in the program.

What was the number of HISD students in the JJAEP during the fall and spring semesters of the 1997–98 school year?

The total number of HISD students placed in the JJAEP during the 1997–98 school year was 456. As **Table 1** indicates, in the fall semester of 1997, a total number of 270 HISD students were enrolled in the program. In the spring semester of 1998, the number of enrollment increased to 311 students. However, 125 students were returned to their home schools after completing their term at the end of fall, 1997 (see **Table 2**). Hence, the 311 total students in the spring semester of 1998 included 145 "carry–overs" from the fall of 1997.

What was the attendance rate of HISD students in the JJAEP during the 1997–98 school year?

The attendance rate of HISD students at the JJAEP during the 1997–98 school year ranged from 87% to 89%. This range was provided by the JJAEP personnel .

What was the percentage of HISD students who returned to the regular school setting during the fall and spring semesters of the 1997–98 school year?

During the fall semester of 1997, 125 students out of the total number of 270 returned to their regular school setting after completing the program. This number reflected 46.3% of HISD students in the JJAEP who completed the program and returned to their regular or home schools.

As Table 2 indicates, in the spring of 1998, 55 HISD students completed the program and returned to their home schools. This number reflected 17.7%

Table 1: JJAEP Student Demographic Characteristics, 1997–98 School Year

	Fall (N)	Spring (N)	Diff. (%)
Native American	0	0	0.0
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0	0.0
African American	132	138	4.5
Hispanic	126	164	30.2
White	12	9	25.0
Female	56	57	1.8
Male	214	254	18.7
Total	270	311	15.2

Table 2: Students Who Completed the JJAEP, Fall 1997 and Spring 1998.

	Fall 1997		Spring 1998	
Grade	n	%	n	%
5	1	0.4	0	0.0
6	13	4.8	6	1.9
7	17	6.3	10	3.2
8	21	7.8	15	4.8
9	47	17.4	19	6.1
10	15	5.5	4	1.3
11	8	3.0	1	0.3
12	3	1.1	0	0.0
Total	125	46.3	55	17.7

of the HISD students enrolled in the program during the spring semester. It should, however, be pointed out that of the 55 students who returned to their regular school setting, 37 were placed back in the program. The parents of these students and the regular schools agreed that the students should continue the program although they had completed their term.

According to the information gathered during the site-visit interviews, 60% to 70% of the students were "carry–overs" to the next semester. The majority of these students were placed in the program due to drug and/or weapon related incidents which normally required placement for one full year.

Discussion

The JJAEP was established to provide an alternative education for the youth who were expelled from school for committing a crime. Students placed in the program required not only academic attention but also counseling for social and emotional problems. According to the analysis of data, there were more African American and Hispanic students in the program than any other ethnic groups. During the fall semester of 1997, African American comprised 48.9% of the students whereas Hispanic population was 46.7%. The percentage of White students in the program was 4.4%. There were no Asian/Pacific Islander or Native American students in the program.

On the basis of the data analysis, it appears that the program met its stated goals. First, the program's main goal was to provide an alternative education to students expelled from their regular school for committing a criminal offense. Information collected during site visits indicated that the educational curriculum was identical to that in regular schools. The grading system was also similar to that in regular schools. It should, however, be pointed out that the learning environment was more structured than that in regular schools. Secondly, there were stricter disciplinary policies which were intended to modify student behavior. Discipline managers were conveniently located near the classrooms to intervene in case of any behavioral problems. Furthermore, student monitors were directly involved in counseling students. A team manager could only intervene if the student monitors' efforts failed. The counseling process involved contacting parents and/or referring a student to in-school suspension (ISS). The ISS center was staffed with the coordinator and was more structured than the regular classrooms. Instruction was, nevertheless, similar to that in other regular classes. Students stayed in the ISS center for 1–3 days. As part of the disciplinary process, law enforcement officers were regularly assigned to work at the program facility. They made sure that the program's position against weapons, illegal drugs, violence, and abusive behavior was adhered to. Moreover, a juvenile judge visited the program every two weeks. During the visits, the judge assigned community service activities to those students who were involved in fights on the facility or who missed classes without an excuse. Thirdly, during the 1997–98 school year, between 30% and 40% of the students completed the program and returned to their home schools. According to the administrative staff of the program, of those students who completed the program and went back to their regular or home schools, very few of them were returned to the program as repeat criminal offenders. However, although 55 students completed their term by the end of the spring semester, 37 of them opted to continue with the program. According to the information obtained from the administrative staff, the sending schools and the parents of these students agreed that the students should continue attending the program indefinitely.

Generally, teachers and administrative staff worked hard to make a positive step towards changing the lives of these highly at-risk students. They worked in collaboration with not only the sending schools to monitor the progress of the students but also with the parents and other members of the community to make sure that these youngsters were out of the streets committing criminal activity.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this report, the following recommendations were made:

1. Strive to increase student attendance rate from between 87% and 89% to the State of Texas' minimum requirement of 94%. Furthermore, since student transportation to and from the program facility does not appear to be a problem, 65%–70% of the students should maintain an attendance rate of 100%. The City-As-School, a similar program as JJAEP offered in Buffalo, New York, had 65% of its students maintain 100% attendance rate for a period of two years.

2. Although the Memorandum of Understanding did not specify the percentage of students that should be returned to their home schools within a period of time, the JJAEP should continue to increase efforts to return more students to their regular school setting. These efforts were demonstrated in the fall of 1997 when 125 students completed the program and returned to their regular schools. Additionally, during the spring of 1998, 55 students returned to their regular school setting after finishing their term at the JJAEP.

3. Since more students are opting to continue the program after completing their term, the JJAEP may consider creating an additional program specifically designed to accommodate these students. This will reduce overcrowding and the student/teacher ratio. Parents and the sending schools indirectly demonstrated that need at the end of the spring of 1998 when they chose to keep 37 students in the program even though the students had completed their term.

References

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